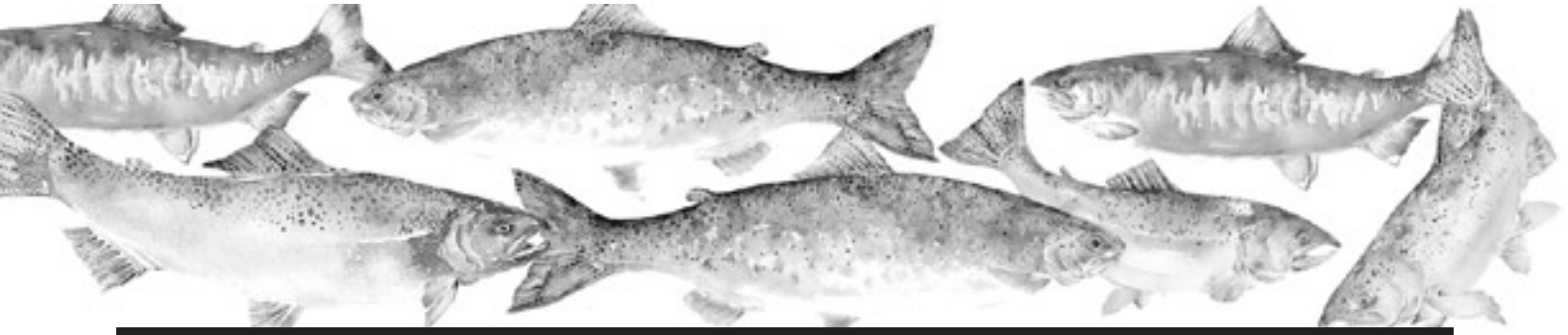

Clark County, Washington **Endangered Species Act** *Information*

Frequently asked questions

about the Endangered Species Act and salmon recovery in Clark County

Does "take" under the ESA apply to all fish or just the wild ones?

"Take" applies only to wild salmon that are listed as threatened or endangered. Salmon and steelhead raised in hatcheries are not protected under the Endangered Species Act. If listed salmon or steelhead are accidentally caught while angling, they must be released. Hatchery fish, identifiable by the clipped adipose fin (see below), may be kept within limits prescribed by the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife.

What's the difference between wild fish and hatchery fish?

Fish raised in hatcheries are usually marked by removing the adipose or ventricle fins. The adipose fin is the small "fatty" fin on top of the fish between the dorsal fin and tail. Every salmonid also has a pair of ventricle fins on its "belly," between the pectoral fin and the tail. Small wire ID tags are sometimes inserted into the nose of a hatchery fish to allow state and tribal fisheries managers to track its age, where it was born, and when it was released into the wild.

Although Washington State boasts the largest hatchery production system in the world, hatchery fish have contributed to the decline of wild fish through genetic impacts, increased competition, and disease transmission. Others factors of decline include habitat degradation and loss, overharvest, dams, land use practices, and wasteful water practices.

What's the difference between Threatened and Endangered?

The Endangered Species Act allows for two levels of protection: threatened and endangered. Endangered means that a population or species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. Threatened means that a species or population is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. Endangered listings immediately trigger the full protection of the ESA; with threatened listings, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have more flexibility in how the species should be protected and recovered.

Why should we put effort into restoring salmon habitat in areas that don't support viable salmon populations?

If critical habitat has been degraded in an area that once supported healthy populations of salmon, we have an obligation to restore the "properly functioning condition" to the ecosystem. These conditions have been identified by NMFS as necessary for salmon survival. Restoring degraded areas increases the chances for the remaining salmon to rebuild self-sustaining populations. Many streams in Clark County offer potential salmon habitat.

Why hasn't the county been able to remove or replace more culverts to help fish?

Restoration projects, which typically require the use of heavy equipment, can harm fish while they are underway. Even though such projects can benefit fish over the long term, if they create short-term negative impacts, then the ESA mandates that a certain process be followed. Like anyone else who develops in Clark County, county government needs permit approval to do work in sensitive areas. This includes projects designed to help restore critical salmon habitat and remove barriers such as culverts that restrict salmon and steelhead migration. Unfortunately, in 2000 the county did not receive the necessary authorization from NMFS and the Army Corps of Engineers to proceed with several projects that we designed and funded. The federal agencies have said there is a huge backlog of regional projects that need to be reviewed before being authorized. The agencies are working to develop a more efficient method for issuing permits.

We've had impressive returns of salmon this year. Have we succeeded in restoring the depleted runs?

Even when salmon populations are healthy, the returning runs vary in size from year to year according to such factors as ocean conditions, the amount of available bait fish, and the condition of spawning and rearing habitat. Historically, 19 million salmon and steelhead returned to the Columbia River each year to spawn. Today, only about one million fish return, and of those, 90 percent were artificially produced in hatcheries. The fact remains that each year salmon are getting pushed closer to extinction.

If we use historical run sizes as our

point of comparison, it's clear that we still have lots of work to do. Wild salmon populations in the Columbia need to grow much larger if they are going to be healthy again. One year's run size is a poor indication of a cycle that spans decades. We make retirement plans according to stock market trends over many years, and not on the basis of what Wall Street did last week. Similarly, we need to consider long-term salmon population trends in order to measure the health and viability of returning runs and to guide us in our salmon recovery efforts.

If I don't live on a stream or river, do I need to worry about salmon recovery?

Salmon habitat is more than just water. It actually includes the entire watershed, which is all of the land that drains to the stream, river, or estuary that salmon live in. Streams are very sensitive to changes in the land throughout the watershed. Even though you may live miles from the nearest stream, your actions affect that stream and its salmon. Rain can wash your fertilizer, weed killer, and motor oil into stormdrains and eventually into streams. If you remove trees or increase the amount of land covered by asphalt and concrete, less water will soak into the ground and more water will flood into the stream when it rains, causing flooding and erosion and scouring away spawning gravels. No matter where you live, you need to be concerned about how your habits affect the health of our waterways and the survival of salmon.

If salmon are threatened, why are we allowing any fishing at all?

Some populations of wild salmon are healthy and can sustain some harvest pressure. Others are declining and must be protected.

If salmon are threatened, should we be buying it in supermarkets?

Although several species of salmon and steelhead are protected under the ESA, you can still enjoy the salmon and steelhead you purchase at the supermarket. Under the ESA, fish harvest is strictly controlled so that it doesn't jeopardize any protected species. Most supermarket fish is raised in hatcheries and fish farms. Some markets sell wild fish from healthy populations.

If salmon are plentiful in one stream, how can they be listed as threatened in another?

The National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) lists fish with a given "evolutionarily significant unit" (ESU). There may be streams within an ESU with healthy populations of fish, even though they are considered threatened within the greater ESU. The apparently plentiful fish in these streams would also be considered "threatened" if the population of the ESU is considered threatened.

How much money will recovery cost?

While it's hard to estimate the final dollar amount of salmon recovery, these costs are paid by tax payers nationwide as well as tax payers across the state. It's worth considering that many of the costs of salmon recovery could be offset by the economic benefits and new jobs that could result from improving conditions for salmon and for the environment as a whole.

Is there a quantifiable goal for salmon recovery?

There will be. NMFS is in the process of drafting a plan that would include target numbers for various population species.

For information about salmon recovery in Clark County, contact the Clark County Endangered Species Program at (360)397-2022 or www.saveoursalmon.com.

CLARK COUNTY, WASHINGTON

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